

script

The Way Kristen Eats Marshmallows

“What are you doing?” I say,
and Kristen grins like the Cheshire Cat
after one-too-many beers, peeling the skin off her marshmallow
like the skin from a grape.
It falls away in a flaky spiral as if it were departing from
the body of a reptile.
A moment suspends the sugary screen
above her mouth, its transparent sides
housing the silhouettes of flame.
My eyes rest on her fingers as they pinch
the crispy shell between thumb index,
and Kristen smiles menacingly.
“I like it better this way,” she tells me,
and crunches while lowering the fleshy, naked puff
back into the fire for another round of burning.

Blair Tellers

Poem

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Everyone

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Four-dollar Epiphany

Allison Geeslin

"We have a full flight tonight, ladies and gentlemen, so please don't linger in the aisles. If you find that all overhead bins are full, please give your bag to one of the flight attendants, and we will check it for you."

The woman's voice was too loud for Southwest Flight 1197, full service to Spokane, Washington. She spoke directly into the microphone, her lips brushing against the ridges in the black plastic. Yet, despite their volume, her words sounded stale, as if the phrases had long passed their expiration date.

"Wonder how many years she's been doin' this," said an old man with the in-flight magazine propped against his stomach. The girl sitting by the window shrugged.

"Too long, I'll bet," he continued. "Hey, you don't happen to know a five-letter word for a member of the Birch family, do you?"

The girl shook her head and turned to look out the window once more. The dark sky was still spitting rain. Gently, it broke up the reflection of the runway lights, smearing red and gold across the black pavement.

"Mind if I sit here?"

The man was young, and he gestured at the middle seat next to her. In a sudden glance she saw his dark hair, strong jawline, and startling blue eyes. For the first time that evening, she smiled.

"Did you hear how much drinks cost?" he asked after he sat down.

"Drinks? I...I think they're free."

"No, I mean the alcoholic ones."

"Oh...no. I didn't catch that. Maybe four dollars? I'm not sure."

"God, these people," he sighed, fumbling with his wallet. "They jack the prices because they know we'll pay them. They know we need the stuff. Extortion, that's what it is. But you...I bet you don't drink do you?"

"No, I don't," she said quietly.

"Knew it. I had you pegged as soon as I sat down. Mormon, are you?"

"No!" she said in sudden surprise. "No, no."

"You sure? Because you look like one. I mean really, really look like one."

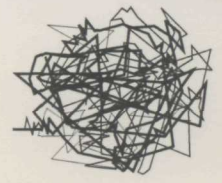
"Yes, I'm sure."

"Religious, though, I bet. Am I right?"

"Well, I'm a Christian, if that's what you..."

"Christian, hm? I can see it. Yeah, definitely." He leaned closer, and his breath was heavy with the warm smell of alcohol. "Tell me, something, then. Are you afraid of going down in this plane?"

"Well...I don't really want to burn in some fiery crash, but—"



Of a star not from any constellation

Allison Dauer

"Because I am. I mean, honestly, flying scares me. Surprises you, doesn't it? I hide it pretty well. I—oh, God. What is that?"

"It sounded like he just pulled in the landing gear," she said, faintly smiling. "I don't think it's anything to worry about."

"Oh, I'm not worried. I just like to know what's going on. But you know what? If something really was wrong, we'd be the last to hear about it. That pilot up there wouldn't say anything. 'Trying to keep people from panicking' and all that. Bet he wouldn't even give us enough time to make it out the emergency exit. How do you feel about epiphanies?"

"Epiphanies?"

"Yeah, you know, like this flash of—I don't know—truth or whatever. A kind of vision. But not, you know? Well, I had one."

"Hmm."

"It wasn't too long ago—maybe a week or two. Anyway, it was pretty much right after I broke up with my girlfriend. She was clingy, you know. Needy. And jealous. God, she was jealous. I felt like I couldn't breathe. I told her that, but she didn't take it too well. She started sending me these crazy calls and texting me all the time. I swear there's something wrong with her. Anyway, I was just laying in bed one night, staring up at the ceiling. My phone went off for the hundredth time, but, just as I was reaching for it, I had this feeling. It was in my gut, but it was bright, lighting up the whole room. It was like, 'Enough of the dirt,' you know? Get out. Get out of it. Right then, I knew."

"You knew what?"

"That God was there."

"Really." It was more of a statement than a question.

"No doubt."

"So...what did you do about it?"

"Well, for one, I didn't answer the phone. Deleted her from my contact list, too. Couldn't call her now if I wanted to." The proud smile on his face faded suddenly as he looked out the dark window. "God, this flight is long, isn't it? Can I borrow four bucks from you? I think I'm going to need more than one drink."

Who determines importance? Is it what the teachers preach in the classroom? Is it what the media puts in red letters and flashing lights? Is it what the blogosphere pings and trackbacks to? Will there be a flashing "42" when you reach the end of the universe, the brink of wisdom and understanding? Or will you go on blogging mindlessly, sharing the intimate slivers of yourself in inarticulate encryption to the other lonely souls of the world. It's hard to write without venturing into the personal. Without hinting at some intimate secret that, by the very nature of being a secret, you have held close to your heart.

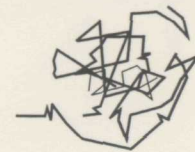
What do you write when it becomes a chore, when the words appear meaningless and nothing you say makes any sense? Perhaps nothing, but perhaps in that empty void where words mutiny, perhaps there you find everything. In those moments when silence is nearest heaven, there is something to be said for sitting back and reflecting.

Maybe you'll take the time to ponder your identity, the passage of time, how long it takes to drive from one point to the next. Or maybe you'll just sit and muse over all the things you could say and nearly suffer a brain aneurism from all the synapse firing that doesn't even find you a ride out of Land-That-Lacketh-Ideas. Perhaps the Craisins in your hand will reinflate, becoming more than humiliated cranberries, whispering to you the wonders of the world, and even beyond the world—Mars, Gallifrey, Utopia.

Grab anything nearby that may spark some inspiration. Maybe the smell of lilacs will remind you of home and spring and how your sister wanted to play in the wagon that you and your best friend were going to ride in for the kids parade. And when you did ride in the parade, sheltered from the friendly eyes of other parents by cardboard walls, you would eat Oreos. Your teeth were probably near black because five-year-olds don't have much self-control when it comes to sugar.

It seems like a lot of people lack self-control, you muse. But that's not something you want to write about. You could probably come up with some strong opinions, but you don't like stepping on other people's toes—especially when some come equipped with steel-toed boots.

What do you like? Well, chocolate and raspberries and apricots and just about any fruit, you realize. Food isn't very insightful, though. Sure blueberries are high in antioxidants, but those fall in the list of only-eaten-when-baked. You make a point of trying one, possibly two, every year when they're ripe and being picked. Plunging your teeth into the dark blue skin and through to the white flesh, you have rediscovered your dislike every year. Maybe if you could learn to like them you'd remember what you were trying to do before you thought to clean the house.



Entangled our words

Jennifer Pullen

Brice watched Andy apply her lipstick, smoothing a rich merlot red across her lips with perfect precision. Her feet were propped up on the night stand, her cotton dress bunched up at the top of her thighs. Brice watched Andy as she rolled her lips together and tilted her head slightly, gazing at her own reflection, searching for flaws. He wondered what exactly she saw in the mirror; was it the same thing he saw? Did she see a white oval of a face, with lips the color of spilt wine, eyebrows like a dash of charcoal on a canvas? He leaned back farther in the white wicker chair and absentmindedly ran a hand across his jaw. Andy curled and uncurled her toes at the edges of the dresser, which was even whiter than she was. Brice smiled slightly.

"Do you want to go out tomorrow?" he asked.

"Out where?" asked Andy, without even ceasing her morning toilette. Now she'd progressed to eyeliner, defining the lids of her eyes with the precision of a map-maker.

"To that new Jazz place, maybe," said Brice.

"I hate Jazz."

"No one hates Jazz."

Andy laughed, "Okay, you're right, I don't hate jazz." She leaned forward a bit and ran her fingers through her hair, starting at her temples and working backwards, combing out the evidence of the night. In his mind's eye Brice saw her again as she'd been, asleep and vulnerable in the morning light, rumbled mahogany curls juxtaposed against rumpled sheets the color of bone. He pulled himself back to the present, turning off his poet's eye. He'd write that thought down later: *wood to bone, shadow to sand, the topography of love...*

"So would you like to go then?" he asked.

Andy shook her head. "No, jazz is too melancholy."

Brice raised one eyebrow. "Too melancholy? Nonsense, there's no such thing."

Andy stood up, and Brice restrained a sigh of disappointment as her skirt slid down, covering her soft skin. "Yes, there is. I'm twenty-two."

"Much did I rage when young, Being by the world oppressed," quoted Brice. Andy walked over to the window and slid it open, staring down into the street below. The sound of traffic filled the room. She was silent.

"Yeats," said Brice, helpfully, "Youth and Age, written in 1924."

The sound of screeching tires floated in through the window. Brice stood up and stood behind Andy, wrapping his arms around her waist, and pressed a kiss just below her ear.

"But now with a flattering tongue It speeds the parting guest," he murmured

"But now with a flattering tongue It speeds the parting guest," he murmured softly.

Andy twined her fingers in his, "Enough Yeats, professor."

Outdoors a black Rolls Royce drove by, black with gleaming chrome and one dent in the fender. Andy stared at it, perplexed. "Brice, isn't that your car?"

Brice shifted uncomfortably, "Yes."

"Then who is driving it?"

Brice let go of her and stepped back. "I sold it."

"Why?"

"For rent."

"But it was a beautiful car!" she said.

"I have to eat, and I have to live. What else was there to do?" replied Brice.

"Well, having a job would help with such dilemmas, for one," said Andy.

Brice pushed past Andy and shut the window with a loud thud. One corner of the opaque blue curtain was shut in the frame. "I quit my professorship to write. You know that."

Andy looked up at him, "You're too old to be a starving artist," she said.

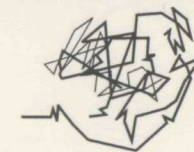
"And you're too young for jazz," he said flatly.

Andy gathered her shoes up in her hand, their patent-leather toes tapping together.

"I need to go now," she said. Brice stared at her as if he didn't recognize her.

"Goodbye," he said. There was no promise of tomorrow in the words. Andy shut the door behind her, and Brice sighed, pressing his forehead against the door frame, the chill wood cooling his skin. His hands felt heavy and wooden. The sound of a car backfiring on the street below made its way through the shut window.

"I think," said Brice to himself, "I prefer Yo Yo Ma."



A Story Without Words

Corin Fayé

I

In the afternoon, Reuben Lockart went into his bedroom to change. He had made arrangements to meet Isabel at the park in a half-hour, and he could put it off no longer.

He fully intended to propose marriage to her; it had come upon him the week before—the idea of it. He had fought it away with as much tenacity as he possessed, but had eventually fallen captive to the happy suggestion. It ignited in him all the latent and powerful feelings towards a woman, a year older than he, who had been his friend for so long, and who had become the object of his love.

Love was a dull word for him, and he almost allowed himself "passion." But passion had too many footnotes attached to it, and he felt it was impossible to live up to them.

He went into his bedroom and put on his best clothes. All the summer long, ever since his friendship with Isabel had deepened, he had worn his best clothes. They had gone so many places together—to the waterfront, to the park, to the museums, the local cafés, the restaurants in the Old Town. He had faithfully come at her beckoning to her house in the older, wealthier part of Tacoma and spent whole afternoons with her and her family. He was familiar with them from childhood, when his family and hers had lived next door to each other. They had since drifted apart, but he and Isabel had kept in touch, and, over the past year, both having graduated from college and returned to their families for the summer, they had come together again.

His enthusiasm for her had grown steadily over the three months of their companionship. She had many friends, but she seemed willing to spend more time with him than with anyone. She told him she enjoyed this reminder of the "old days," but he hoped, of course, that she was also delighted with his company for the sake of the present as well.

He did not fall in love easily—well, he never had before. Yet it was wonderful for him to realize, with increasing joy and fear, that he was falling head-over-heels for her, that he was ecstatic about her, and that now they were no longer children—he was twenty-three and she twenty-four. They behaved as children at times because they had been young together, but he was aware, suddenly, of their maturity.

He had put off the question of love and marriage because he had been partly afraid of it—but now that he had admitted it, it made him impatient. What if he had waited too long? What if she had been waiting for him to say something and had given up on him? What if that other friend of hers had won her over instead?

The whole week he had been anxious, and, of course, it was the week in which he had seen her the least. She had not been available to go to Seattle with him on